

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter Year A, 2023

**Acts 2:14, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-6; 1 Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10**

We are, now, in the Fourth Sunday in Eastertide. I pray that we swim along with the tide, not against the time. May we be energized by the power of the Risen Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is celebrated by the Catholic Church as Good Shepherd Sunday and World Day of Prayer for Vocations. It is a Sunday we reflect on how we listen and follow Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and how we can imitate him in our various shepherding responsibilities. It is, also, a Sunday we pray for more laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

In John 10:11, "Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." This is what Jesus has done for us. We, his sheep, are to hear his voice and recognize his voice, as he calls us by name and leads us out. He walks ahead of us, and we are to follow him (John 10:3-5).

Jesus says in the gospel, "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:9-10).

The Evil One is the stranger and the thief. He tries, also, to call us, to speak to us, to steal us, and to lead us astray. We are not to listen to him or follow him. Jesus says, "run away from him" (John 10:5). St. James encourages us, "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

We pray with today's Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures, he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. He guides me in the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are at my side, with your rod and your staff that give me courage" (Psalm 23).

Some leaders and rulers only steal, slaughter, and destroy as Jesus describes. They are like the bad shepherds, in Ezekiel's prophecy, who pasture themselves and not the flock. They consume milk, wear wool, and slaughter fatlings, but the flock they do not pasture. They do not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. They do not bring back the stray or seek the lost but rule them harshly and brutally. For these reasons, the flock scatter and become food for wild beasts (Ezekiel 34:2-6). People suffering, scattering, dying, and fleeing their homelands, brain drain, refugee crises, disturbances, conflicts, wars, violence, and so on are caused by the bad shepherds. The blood of those suffering and dying at seas, in deserts, in captivity, in the hands of criminals and terrorists are on the hands of the bad shepherds. They will not escape judgement! We pray for their change of heart. St. Paul instructs us, "Pray for kings and those in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2).

However, parents and everyone in any position of responsibility are shepherds. Your profession, vocation, business, and so on makes you a shepherd. Therefore, we are all shepherds in one way or another. We are to look up to Jesus as our model and imitate him. He is the truth. We are called to life of truthfulness. He laid down his life for us. We are called to selfless service and sacrifice. He is the gate through which we are saved and find pasture. We are called to become gateways through which solutions can be found. Can I be a gateway of relief, or of success, or of healing, or of progress, or of improvement for someone? Or, am I a stone or concrete high wall like the Wall of Gibraltar that stops advancements and achievements?

Today is, also, a day of prayer for vocations. Jesus says, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). According to records, the number of priests worldwide in 2019 is 414,336. In 2021, the number is 407,872 (a decrease of 6,464). In 2019, the number of seminarians worldwide is 114,058. In 2021, the number is 109,895 (a decrease of 4,163). Meanwhile, the population of Catholics has increased from 1.34 billion in 2019 to 1.37 billion in 2021. Indeed, the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few! Therefore, there is every reason to pray that more men of goodwill embrace the priesthood vocation. We, also, pray for God's graces on seminarians and their formators and God's blessings on benefactors of seminaries. Amen.

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